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SUBJECT: SOUTH AFRICAN ENVIRONMENT, SCIENCE, AND TECHNOLOGY MONTHLY BRIEFINGS, OCTOBER 2007

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¶1. (U) Summary: This is the South African Environment, Science and Technology Monthly Briefings newsletter, October 2007, Volume 2, Number 7, prepared by the U.S. Embassy Pretoria, South Africa.

Topics of the newsletter:

- MINISTER POSTPONES BAN ON ABALONE HARVESTING
- GREEN SCORPIONS SHUT DOWN ACELORMITTAL DUMP SITE
- AFRICA COULD CASH IN ON CARBON CREDITS
- LEARNING MATH AND SCIENCE FROM A CELL PHONE
- GAUTRAIN PROJECT TO ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO PURSUE CAREERS IN MATH AND SCIENCE
- NEDBANK ON GREENING CRUSADE
- GM MAIZE LEVELS EXCEED FIFTY PERCENT IN SA
- CONVENTION CENTER YIELDS RETURNS FOR CAPE TOWN

End Summary.

MINISTER POSTPONES BAN ON ABALONE HARVESTING

¶2. (U) Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT) Marthinus Van Schalkwyk postponed the cabinet-approved ban on commercial harvesting of wild abalone one day before it was to take effect. The ban, which was to commence on November 1, 2007, was originally imposed to protect the over-harvested and poached abalone stocks. Abalone has become a prized commodity for both local entrepreneurs and organized crime within South Africa. The number of poached abalone confiscated in South Africa has risen from 21,000 in 1994 to over one million in 2007. The biggest market for abalone is Asia where it is used for medicinal purposes and is considered a seafood delicacy.

¶3. (U) The Congress of South African Trade Union (COSATU) and other stakeholders are opposed to the proposed ban. COSATU attacked the government for not consulting with all stakeholders before taking such a drastic action. COSATU warned that over 800 jobs could be lost if the ban was not lifted. Labor movement spokesman Tony Ehrenreich agreed that poachers must be eliminated, but maintained that abalone fishing was a necessity for the coastal communities that have depended upon it for generations. Head of the 302-member South African Abalone Industry Association Scott Russell threatened to take legal action against the minister for what he called "economically crippling intentions and actions." Minister Van Schalkwyk said the ban could still be implemented on February 1, 2008, but only after a further careful review.

GREEN SCORPIONS SHUT DOWN ACELORMITTAL DUMP SITE

¶4. (U) South Africa's environmental management inspectors (EMIs),

also known as the "Green Scorpions," have shut down AcelorMittal's waste operations site in the Vaal in Guateng province. An earlier assessment of the waste site had revealed illegal dumping of hazardous waste on prohibited landfill sites, resulting in surface and groundwater contamination with iron, oil, fluoride, etc. EMIs had warned AcelorMittal about these illegal activities, but the company had not rectified their practices, according to the Department of Environment and Tourism Affairs (DEAT) authorities. Green Scorpion spokesperson Sizwe Matshikiza said the company provided "dissatisfactory submissions about their environmental compliance, which prompted the authorities to issue a directive and compliance notice against the company." The notice instructed AcelorMittal to stop all operations at the site, and to remove the 100,000 tons of magnetite it had dumped there. Matshikiza noted that the company had until December 2008 to remove the hazardous waste and to rehabilitate the site.

AFRICA COULD CASH IN ON CARBON CREDITS

¶5. (U) The South African government's Central Energy Fund (CEF) has launched CEF Carbon, an international carbon trading company. CEF Carbon will assist South African and other African countries to develop Clean Development Mechanisms (CDM) projects. CEF Chief Executive Mputumi Ndamane said CEF Carbon should stimulate growth of CDM projects. Ndamane noted that South Africa lags behind other countries in creating viable CDM projects, and has only twenty CDM projects in the pipeline to date, while China and Latin America have over 500 and India has over 600. South African regulatory law firm Weber, Wentzel and Bowens Head of Financial Services and Carbon Unit Johann Scholtz said South Africa must start implementing carbon reduction mechanisms and transactions now. He noted that South Africa is a carbon-based economy and is likely to incur emission reduction obligations by 2012. He sees "huge opportunities" for CEF Carbon to make use of the CDM in South Africa.

LEARNING MATH AND SCIENCE FROM A CELL PHONE

¶6. (U) South African math teacher Kumaras Pillay developed the Mlearner program, which allows school children to access a website with math and science content using a basic cell phone. The program includes a world-wide cell phone-compatible forum where school children can compare and share notes, ask questions, obtain

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assistance, write online tests and obtain results instantly. Burnwood Secondary School principal Nanesh Gokal manages the Mlearner website (www.mlearner.co.za). Gokal noted that initial difficulties included getting mathematical and scientific symbols to match the cell phone keys, and the small screen size of a cell phone. U.S.-based Microsoft has already visited the school in Kwa-Zulu Natal province to discuss Mlearner with Pillay. Pillay plans to enter the Mlearner program in the Microsoft Worldwide Innovative Teachers Forum competition in Helsinki. The Mlearner has already won the national Innovative Teachers Forum Award in Johannesburg in September 2007.

GAUTRAIN PROJECT TO ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO PURSUE CAREERS IN MATH AND SCIENCE

¶7. (U) The Gautrain Project has launched an educational website encouraging South African school children to pursue engineering, math, science and technology careers. The website introduces high school students to the Gautrain project, providing progress reports and background information about the skills and careers involved in the project. Gauteng Provincial Minister of Transport Ignatius Jacobs said the Gautrain project is a real-life, practical example of how different careers are working together to build Africa's first rapid rail network project. Jacobs hoped that South African youth would develop the skills to develop and implement massive infrastructure projects. Jacobs added that the only way to obtain the skills needed for major infrastructural projects is for students to study engineering, math and technology. The Gautrain will run between Johannesburg and Pretoria, as well as the O. R. Tambo International Airport in Kempton Park. Gautrain spokesperson Barbara Jensen added that the website was also designed to encourage teenagers to make use of public transport and to raise awareness about issues pertaining to noise and dust pollution.

NEDBAN ON GREENING CRUSADE

¶8. (U) Nedbank, one of South Africa's four largest banks, has begun emphasizing environmental sustainability in its advertising and new products. Nedbank Chief Financial Officer (CFO) Mike Brown said

Nedbank now offers environmentally-oriented products including a credit card that contributes to the environmental causes based on consumer spending. Nedbank is also investigating its energy utilization and carbon footprint. Nedbank currently has an advertisement billboard powered by a solar panel that also generates electricity for a local school kitchen in Alexander. Nedbank is the only bank in South Africa that has signed the Equator Principle, i.e., a commitment that development projects funded by the bank would be environmentally sustainable. Nedbank also sponsors the Green Mining Award which encourages mines to introduce environmental sustainability programs. Brown notes that Nedbank will start focusing on climate change and adaptation activities in the near future.

GM MAIZE LEVELS EXCEED FIFTY PERCENT IN SA

¶9. (U) Monsanto spokesman Bright Breytenbach stated that more than half of all the seeds sold to South African farmers for the next planting season are genetically modified (GM). Breytenbach also noted that local consumers cannot distinguish between GM and organic maize because the two are stored together in grain silos after harvesting. Monsanto biotechnology marketing manager Kobus Steenkamp noted that GM maize has been produced for 12 years in South Africa. Monsanto believes that GM maize in use will reach 75 percent levels in South Africa within the next few years. Elsewhere, the GM Executive Council allowed Monsanto to conduct an event for GM drought resistant corn, which could have a significant economic impact on South Africa's corn producing regions.

CONVENTION CENTER YIELDS RETURNS FOR CAPE TOWN

¶10. (U) Cape Town's International Convention Center (CTICC), established in 2003, contributed over \$37 million to GDP in 2006-2007, according a study conducted jointly by the University of Cape Town and independent economic modeler Antony Boting. The center has been used to host international meetings, private, and public institutional and organizational gatherings. CTICC Managing Director Dirk Elzinga stated that more than 509 conferences, including 46 international conferences, have been held at CTICC, bringing over 45,576 international delegates to Cape Town. The report noted that CTICC also promotes "induced" tourism since delegates tend to extend their stay after attending conferences. These business tourists account for 30 - 40 percent of the center's economic impact. The largest international conference hosted by the CTICC was the 19th World Diabetes Congress held in December 2007, which attracted over 12,300 delegates. CTICC employs 3,796 people directly and 5,343 indirectly. The center has generated approximately R1 billion (\$142.85 million) in foreign exchange, and R222 million (\$31.7 million) in taxes for 2007.

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